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EFFECTIVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE SUPPORT FOR VARIOUS HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURES

LIEKE L. TEN BRUMMELHUIS AND
TANJA VAN DER LIPPE

Today's workforce encompasses a wide variety of employees with specific needs and resources when it comes to balancing work and life roles. Our study explores whether various types of work-life balance support measures improve employee helping behavior and performance among single employees, employees with a partner, and employees with a partner and children. Using a sample of 482 employees at 24 organizations, the results showed that the organization's work-family culture improved work performance among parents but reduced performance among singles. Singles' work outcomes improved, however, when they had access to flexible work arrangements, whereas couples benefited from their supervisors' social support. The results stress the importance of the employee's household structure when considering appropriate support for balancing work and life roles. © 2010 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Keywords: work-life balance, work performance, helping behavior, singles, social support

Introduction

Time pressure is a serious problem in today's workforce, with ever-increasing numbers of workers bearing major responsibilities at home and meeting higher job expectations and heavier demands at work (Glass & Finley, 2002; van der Lippe, 2007). A mismatch between family and work roles can be disadvantageous for both employees and employers. Previous studies found higher stress levels and feelings of burnout; lower levels of job satisfaction, work performance, and organizational commitment; and more absentee-

ism due to work-family conflict (for an overview see Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). To facilitate the work-family balance among employees, organizations are increasingly introducing work-life policies. These policies include options designed to give workers greater flexibility in scheduling (flextime and telecommuting), to assist them with their parenting duties (child care facilities), and to offer emotional support (supportive leadership and organizational culture) (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Work-life policies evaluated in detail in previous studies tend to agree on the beneficial effects on work outcomes of flexi-

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ble work arrangements, child care facilities, and social support (for overviews see Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Glass & Finley, 2002). Raghuram and Wiesenfeld (2004), for example, found that telecommuting reduced job stress. Flexible work schedules have been reported as having beneficial effects on job dedication (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Feild, 2008) and organizational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995). In addition, Thompson and Prottas (2006) found reduced stress and turnover intention when employees received social support from the organization.

Nonetheless, until now two aspects have been overlooked by work-life policy studies.

<p><i>We compare</i></p> <p><i>work-life policies</i></p> <p><i>in terms of their</i></p> <p><i>effectiveness in</i></p> <p><i>improving the</i></p> <p><i>work outcomes of</i></p> <p><i>employees in three</i></p> <p><i>different household</i></p> <p><i>structures: singles,</i></p> <p><i>couples, and</i></p> <p><i>parents.</i></p>	<p>First, the literature on work-life policies has focused on intact nuclear families and largely ignored other household structures, even though these are becoming increasingly prevalent (Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007; Lobel, Googins, & Bankert, 1999; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). Besides dual-earner couples with children, other household structures—single-earner parents, cohabiting couples, and singles—have become more and more common. Still, most organizations introduce work-life policies aimed primarily at employees with a family (Young, 1999). Previous studies have reported that this organizational focus leads to feelings of exclusion and unfairness among single employees and employees without children (Grandey, 2001; Grover, 1991; Young, 1999). This, in turn, may result in increased turnover intention and job dissatisfaction among these employees (Parker & Allen, 2001). Moreover, singles and employees without children may face other demands in their personal lives than dual-earner couples with children, including volunteer work or an active involvement in leisure pursuits. In addition, singles receive less support from their family domain than employees with a nuclear family, as singles</p>
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lack emotional support from a partner or children (Casper et al., 2007). The fact that employees with differing household structures have different responsibilities and various types of support at home led us to question what work-life balance policies support which types of household structures.

Second, more research is needed on the theoretical underpinning that explains when work-life balance policies effectively improve work outcomes. Two opposing theories commonly used to explain the work-family link can be of help: the conflict approach and the enrichment approach. The conflict approach assumes that combining a work and family role is demanding and therefore leads to conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Support is then most effective when it is provided to employees with heavy family demands. The enrichment approach emphasizes that family life can enrich work outcomes because it produces several resources, such as fulfillment and skills (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Support is then most helpful for employees who lack such family resources. Thus far, it is unknown, however, which theory best explains when work-life balance (WLB) effectively improves work outcomes: when it is given to employees with heavy demands (conflict approach) or to employees who lack several rewarding family resources (enrichment approach).

To fill these gaps, we compare work-life policies in terms of their effectiveness in improving the work outcomes of employees in three different household structures: singles (employees without a partner and without children), couples (employees with a partner, but without children), and parents (employees with a partner and children). We focus on work outcomes as work-life policies are introduced by employers, whose primary interest is to achieve high work outcomes. We distinguish between two work outcomes: work performance, referring to the productive outcome of an employee's effort (Hackman & Walton, 1986), and helping behavior, which is the employee's voluntary, cooperative behavior directed toward co-workers (Anderson & Williams, 1996). Work performance was chosen because it is considered the single most pervasive and distinctive work outcome

(Waldman & Spangler, 1989). We included helping behavior because this behavior is of vital importance for organizational functioning now that organizations are increasingly using team-based work designs that require cooperation among co-workers (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). We followed a commonly used method of classifying work-life practices into formal policies and informal policies. The first refer to the organization's institutionalized policies aimed at integrating multiple life roles (such as providing flexible work arrangements). The latter refer to informal practices that support employees in achieving work-life balance, including emotional support from the direct supervisor (supervisor support) and from the organization in general (family responsive organizational culture) (Anderson et al., 2002; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Together, we refer to these policies as work-life balance support (WLB support).

To summarize, this study extends previous studies by comparing the relationship between WLB support and work outcomes among singles, couples, and parents. We test which of two opposing theoretical approaches better explains the effectiveness of WLB support. This study offers a response to calls in the literature for a more detailed evaluation of work-life policies, taking into account the diverse needs of today's workforce and the various types of support available (Glass & Finley, 2002; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002; Premeaux, Adkins, & Mossholder, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Conflict or Enrichment?

Conflict theory provides an underlying theoretical perspective of the effectiveness of work-life policies. Conflict theory proposes that using human time and energy in one role (e.g., family) decreases the time and energy remaining for other roles (e.g., work), thereby undermining performance in that role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). According to conflict theory, the relationship between family and work is best expressed as a zero-sum game

because human time and energy are limited resources. Time and energy spent on the family cannot be invested in work, and vice versa (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998). Employees who have heavier family demands will have less time and energy for their work, reducing their work outcomes. Work-life policies intervene in this negative work-family relationship by saving time, replenishing the employee's energy levels, and reducing experienced conflict. To reciprocate the benefits received from their employer, employees invest the resulting time and energy in their work (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). Previous studies confirm that organizational support increases organizational commitment and motivates employees to expend effort in their work (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Lyness, 2006).

In reaction to conflict theory, a growing number of authors have argued that the conceptualization of work and family as time- and energy-consuming entities is too simplistic (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Family can also act as a resource for work, as suggested by the enrichment approach of the family-work link (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) described three mechanisms that make family directly beneficial to work. First, family life can be a source of fulfillment, respect, and energy that can be invested in work. For example, family members can act as sounding boards and motivators (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002) and assist with domestic duties (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). Second, family life can help employees develop several skills and gain experience and knowledge that they can then use at work. Third, participating in both family life and work extends an employee's network, that is, his or her social capital. Social capital, such as the partner's professional contacts, can be used to advance the employee's career. The enrichment approach differs from the conflict theory by suggesting that family life (having a partner and children and performing family tasks) can be beneficial for work outcomes because it can contribute to the employee's resources. Employees who lack

family resources thus also lack the benefits of such resources at work. Work-life balance support, then, will improve work outcomes if the support compensates for a lack of family resources.

In this study, we use insights from both the conflict and enrichment theories to explain when WLB support most effectively increases work outcomes: if introduced as an answer to heavy family demands (conflict approach) or when filling in for a lack of family resources (enrichment approach).

We use insights from both the conflict and enrichment theories to explain when WLB support most effectively increases work outcomes: if introduced as an answer to heavy family demands (conflict approach) or when filling in for a lack of family resources (enrichment approach).

We do this by investigating whether the family structures of parent, couple, and single, which vary in family demands and family resources, moderate the relationship between WLB support and work outcomes. The sum of work and family demands is greatest among employees with a partner and children, followed by employees with a partner, and finally by singles (Netherlands Office for Social Research [SCP], 2006, pp. 102–104). Moreover, in addition to time spent on work and household tasks, employees with a family will have more worries about family members and more situations in which they are required to provide immediate support and care (Glass & Finley, 2002). Following the argument of the conflict approach, WLB support increases work outcomes most among parents, then couples, and least among singles. We assume that the more family members the employee has, the more family resources he or she

can access. For example, family members can provide instrumental help (taking over household tasks) and empathy, love, and advice (van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006). Employees with a partner and children therefore have more family resources than employees with a partner but without children, and even more than singles without children. On the basis of the enrichment approach, it can be argued that singles are supported most

effectively by WLB strategies that replace these family resources, then couples, and finally parents. In the following section we specify our expectations about the relationships among the various types of WLB support and the work outcomes for parents, couples, and singles.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements (flextime and telecommuting) are thought to contribute to job motivation and dedication. They also enable the employee to use time more efficiently by scheduling activities in a way that suits his or her situation best (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003). Telecommuting actually saves the employee time, as it saves time commuting that cannot be used for work or family activities. Following the conflict approach, flexible work arrangements pay off most among parents as they have heavier demands for which they need time and energy to balance multiple roles. Previous studies, however, have shown that flexible work arrangements can have disadvantageous side effects because they blur the boundaries between family and work, thus increasing work-family conflict (Desrochers, Hilton, & Larwood, 2005). For example, Peters and van der Lippe (2007) showed that flextime and telecommuting led to more time pressure in the long run among employees with children, and Hill, Hawkins, and Miller (1996) reported that some telecommuters experienced more work-family interference, increasing stress. We expect, therefore, that the enrichment approach is more applicable for explaining the effects of flexible work arrangements on work outcomes. According to this approach, employees without other household members may have most need for flexible work arrangements. For example, when unexpected situations arise at home, such as plumbing repairs, an employee with a partner and children may be able to count on family members to stand in. Moreover, telecommuting for single employees is presumably more efficient, assuming that these employees have fewer interfering family tasks.

We also note that using telecommuting can diminish work outcomes, in particular helping behavior, as this arrangement limits interactions among co-workers (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Previous studies, however, have reported that telecommuting is only harmful for co-worker relationships if used frequently, that is, more than 2.5 days a week (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), noting, too, that full-time telecommuting is rare (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). We hypothesize, therefore, that telecommuting is positively related to work outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: The positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and work outcomes is moderated by family structure: Flexible work arrangements are most strongly, positively, related to work outcomes among singles and least among parents, with couples taking up a middle position.

Supervisor Support

It has been suggested that emotional support at work helps balance work and family roles because it contributes to the employee's energy level (van Daalen et al., 2006). A supportive supervisor may help boost an employee's energy level by discussing family-related problems, reinforce the employee's positive self-image by giving feedback, and reduce stress by showing understanding for the employee's family life (Halbesleben, 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Using insights from the enrichment approach, we expect that such emotional resources help boost employees' work outcomes most when they replace resources that employees lack at home. Singles would then benefit most from supervisor support because they have no family members in the household that provide emotional support on a daily basis. On the basis of the conflict approach, one could argue that parents and couples have more need for supervisor support because they have heavier family demands. Supervisor support, however, is not aimed primarily at combining work and family tasks. Instead, it helps employees in general function better at work and find a work-

life fit (Anderson et al., 2002). We therefore expect that employees with the fewest resources at home profit most from supervisor support.

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between supervisor support and work outcomes is moderated by family structure: Supervisor support is most strongly, positively, related to work outcomes among singles and least among parents, with couples taking up a middle position.

Family-Responsive Culture

In addition to providing flexible work arrangement and emotional supervisor support, the organization's culture toward combining work and family roles is at least as important for employees seeking work-family balance (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). A supportive work environment provides the employee with emotional resources, such as understanding, advice, and recognition (van Daalen et al., 2006). When organizations have an understanding attitude toward employees who combine work and family roles (family-responsive culture), employees are not likely to worry about career opportunities if they reduce their working hours due to family responsibilities (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). In line with the conflict approach, we expect that a family-responsive culture is only relevant for employees who have substantial family responsibilities, such as parents and couples. The enrichment approach, expected to be most effective for employees with the fewest family resources, is less applicable in this case, because singles do not need this particular resource (Muse et al., 2008). A family-friendly culture may even lower singles' work outcomes if they feel excluded by such a culture (Casper et al., 2007). This leads us to Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between family-responsive culture and work outcomes is moderated by family structure: A family-

We expect that employees with the fewest resources at home profit most from supervisor support.

responsive culture is most strongly, positively, related to work outcomes among parents and least among singles, with couples taking up a middle position.

Methods

Data and Procedure

The data were collected in 2007 from employees at 24 Dutch organizations. The “Family and Work Outcomes Survey” (ten Brummelhuis, van der Lippe, & Kluwer, 2007) was designed to study the effects of team members’ family characteristics on work outcomes. The 24 organizations covered four industrial sectors: (1) health care, such as a nursing home and home care center; (2) facility and support, such as a logistics center and a technical support company; (3) commercial service, such as an accounting firm, an IT company, and a lease company; and (4) consultancy, such as an organizational consultancy office and a law firm. Each sector was represented by six organizations. Large organizations were slightly oversampled. Ten organizations had more than 100 employees; seven organizations had between 50 and 100 employees; and seven organizations had fewer than 50 employees.

Organizations were approached via a variety of formal and informal contacts. After consulting the HR staff of each organization, the researchers distributed questionnaires among the employees, accompanied by an introductory letter from the research coordinator with information about the study’s aim and procedure. Employees could fill in the questionnaire at their discretion and return it to the research coordinator. The questionnaire contained questions about the employee’s family life (e.g., time spent on household tasks), work characteristics (e.g., use of flex-time), and work outcomes (e.g., helping behavior). Of the 1,527 questionnaires distributed, 520 were returned (34.1%). This response rate is reasonable for samples in The Netherlands, although rather low compared to international response rates (Stoop, 2005). The sample included more female (59%) than male employees. The distribution of the re-

spondents’ age was normal, with a mean of 38 years ranging from 17 to 63 years. Lower educated employees (no education, primary school, or lower vocational education) were underrepresented (11%), whereas employees with tertiary education were overrepresented (46%). National statistics indicate that 28% of the Dutch population has lower education versus 30% with tertiary education (SCP, 2006). We excluded respondents who lived with their parents ($n = 25$). Single parents ($n = 13$) were also excluded, as this group was too small for a reliable analysis. This resulted in a final sample of 482 employees for this study.

Measures

Work Outcomes

We operationalized *helping behavior* as the social, assisting, and cooperative behavior of the employee directed toward co-workers. The 4-item scale was based on an altruism scale developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999) to measure employees’ attitudes toward helping co-workers. The items were “My colleagues can ask me for help if necessary,” “My colleagues can count on my help if they have difficulties in their work,” “I often help colleagues in need,” and “If a colleague is absent I’m willing to take over the work” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .71$). Answer categories ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

We operationalized *work performance* as the degree to which employee’s productive output (product or service) met the standard of quantity, quality, and timeliness (Hackman & Walton, 1986) as established in organizational targets and compared with co-workers’ performance (Kalleberg & Moody, 1996). Using employee ratings measuring work performance is rather common in work-family research (e.g., Bakker & Xanthopoulos, 2009; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Keene & Reynolds, 2005; Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Wallace & Young, 2008), and the benchmark strategy we used has been validated by others (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998). It is possible that employ-

ees overestimated their own work performance. There is no reason to suspect, however, that such an overestimate differs between singles, couples, and parents. Because we are interested in explaining differences in the relationship between WLB support and work performance and not the main effect, any bias in the work performance measure is unlikely to affect our results.

To measure work performance, we used an 8-item Likert scale based on a scale developed by Roe, Horn, Zinovieva, and Dienes (1997), which included items on output quantity, quality, and efficiency. Sample items included "I'm known as an efficient worker," "I usually need more time to perform my job compared to colleagues" (reverse coded), "There are often complaints about the quality of my work" (reverse coded), and "I usually meet my job targets." Answer categories ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The reliability of the scale was adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$).

The construct validity of the self-report assessment of the two work outcomes was ensured by a principal component analysis (PCA), as well as a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). As expected, the PCA extracted two separate components when entering all work performance and helping behavior items. In addition, we conducted a CFA using the AMOS software package (Arbuckle, 1997). We estimated two measurement models, one including a single latent factor and one with separate factors for performance and helping behavior. The model distinguishing between performance and helping behavior fit the data significantly better than the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 522.6, p < .001$), and all items loaded significantly on the intended factors.

Flexible Work Arrangements

We used information on both the availability of flexible work arrangements and the actual use of such arrangements, because providing flexible policies does not guarantee they will be used (Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). The availability of flexible work arrangements (*FWA availability*) was measured on a 4-item

scale asking respondents whether their organizations provided telecommuting, flexible starting times, flexible ending times, and the option of leaving work immediately if a family emergency arises. A PCA extracted a single component and the reliability of the scale was adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). The use of *telecommuting* was measured by the number of days (ranging from 0 to 5) employees worked at home. We measured the use of *flextime* based on the number of days (ranging from 0 to 5) employees independently determined their starting and ending times.

Supervisor Support

Supervisor support was measured using a 4-item scale designed by van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994). Respondents responded to several statements concerning their supervisor's sympathy, attention, and appreciation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$), with answer categories ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Sample items were "I feel appreciated by my supervisor," "My supervisor shows understanding for any problems and questions concerning my work," and "My supervisor shows understanding for combining work and family tasks."

Family Responsive Culture

Informal support from the organization was operationalized as the organization's positive attitude toward combining work and family life, namely, family-responsive culture (*FR culture*), based on the scale of Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness (1999). Because the organizations restricted the questionnaire length, we only included four of the scale items. Respondents indicated whether they perceived their organization as open and tolerant toward combining family responsibilities and work tasks. Sample items were "This organization is supportive of employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs for family reasons" and "Employees are regularly expected to put their jobs before their families" (reverse coded) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$) with answer categories ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

The construct validity of the two informal organizational support measures was examined by a PCA and CFA. The PCA extracted two separate components when entering all items of FR culture and supervisor support. The model distinguishing between FR culture and supervisor support fitted the data significantly better than the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 221.4, p < .001$), and all items loaded significantly on the intended factors.

Household Structure

For household structure, we asked whether the employee had a partner and whether the employee had children living at home. Combining this information gave us three dummy variables: one for *single* (0 = has a partner, 1 = single, $n = 94$), one for *couple* (0 = single or has children, 1 = cohabiting with partner, no children, $n = 170$), and one for *parent* with partner (0 = single or cohabiting with partner, 1 = living with partner and children, $n = 218$). Only thirteen respondents belonged to the fourth household structure of single parent. We left out this category, as well as employees living in their parents' home, because these employees are dissimilar to any of the other family structures concerning family demands and family resources. Descriptive analyses showed that employees living with their parents had significantly fewer family demands than employees living on their own. Single parents were different from singles due to their heavier family demands and different from parents because they lack a partner.

Control Variables

Several control variables were taken into account. First, we considered the personal background characteristics of gender, age, and educational level. *Gender* was measured by a dummy variable (0 = male, 1 = female); *age* was measured as a continuous variable; and *educational level* was based on an 8-point scale ranging from 1 (primary education or less) to 8 (higher professional or university education). Second, we controlled for the employee's household tasks. Respondents filled in how many hours a week they spent buying

groceries, tidying, cleaning, bookkeeping, carrying out repairs (*household chores*) and taking care of children, accompanying children to activities, and caring for other people (*care tasks*). Third, we controlled for work demands and work resources, regarded as important predictors of work outcomes (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004). As a proxy for work demands, we included *working hours*, measured as the absolute number of working hours per week including overtime, and *work pressure*, measured on a 7-item scale developed by van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994), ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). An example item was "I work under pressure" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$). We added job motivation and job autonomy as proxies for job resources. *Job motivation* was measured on a 4-item scale designed by van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994), with answer categories ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), including items such as "I mainly do my job because I like the work" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$). *Job autonomy* was measured using a 3-item scale developed by van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994). A sample item was "I can determine how I perform my work myself" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), with answer categories ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Finally, we controlled for *business sector*. We distinguished between the non-profit (health care) and profit sector (facility, commercial, and consulting services), using a dummy variable coded 0 = profit sector and 1 = nonprofit sector.

Analysis

We tested the hypotheses using OLS regression with cluster correction, taking into account the nested character of our data. The cluster correction controls for the fact that employees of one organization may be more similar to one another than employees of different organizations. For each work outcome, we estimated the effects of WLB support in two steps. First, the control variables were entered as predictors of the work outcomes (control model). Second, the WLB support variables and the interaction effects of household structure were estimated, test-

ing whether the relationship between WLB support and work outcomes differed between couples or singles and the reference group, “parents.” We calculated the centered cross-products of the five WLB support measures (e.g., telecommuting, supervisor support) with the two dummy variables, couple and single. This resulted in five models for work performance (one for each WLB support measure), each including the controls; the WLB support measures; the household structure dummy variables “singles” and “couples”; and two cross-products. The same five models were estimated for helping behavior. We reported the relationships that significantly differed between singles and parents, or between couples and parents, in the results table. Note that the dummy variable “parent” is not included in the model and thus not reported in the results table because “parents” is the reference group in these models.

To examine all possible differences among the three family structures, we also estimated the models with “singles” as the reference category. These analyses enabled us to check whether the relationships under study differed significantly between singles and couples. In the results section, we indicate whether a result is based on the main analyses, reported in Table II, or on the additional analyses. The significant findings of both analyses are reported in the text of the results section (unstandardized regression coefficient and significance level).

Results

Preliminary analyses

Correlations, means, and standard deviations of the variables are reported in Table I. Work performance was positively correlated to age, job motivation, nonprofit sector, supervisor support, and FR culture, whereas work performance was poorer among singles than couples and parents. Helping behavior was more prevalent among employees who were older, worked longer hours, had more job motivation, had autonomy, and had supervisor support.

Table II shows the regression analyses of helping behavior and work performance. The control model of helping behavior shows that helping behavior was positively related to age. The control model of work performance shows that work performance was positively related to age, education, and job motivation.

Test of Hypotheses

Four of the five tested relationships between the WLB support measures and helping behavior and two out of five relationships between WLB support measures and work performance significantly differed between the household structures (Table II). The significant interaction relationships are depicted in Figures 1 through 6. We will discuss according to type of WLB support how its effect on work outcomes differs among singles, parents, and couples.

FWA availability was positively related to helping behavior among singles, whereas this relationship was negative among couples and parents (Figure 1). This result is in line with the enrichment approach, suggesting that employees with the fewest family resources benefit most from support at work. The relationship between *FWA availability* and helping behavior significantly differed between singles and parents (Table II: $b = .08, p < .01$), as well as between couples and parents (Table II: $b = .05, p < .05$), but not between singles and couples (additional analysis).

The relationship between *telecommuting* and helping behavior differed significantly between singles and parents (Table II: $b = .20, p < .05$), but not between couples and parents (Table II). In accordance with the enrichment approach, we found that singles' work outcomes improved when using

[Flexible work arrangement] availability was positively related to helping behavior among singles, whereas this relationship was negative among couples and parents. This result is in line with the enrichment approach, suggesting that employees with the fewest family resources benefit most from support at work.

TABLE I Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients of the Variables

	Mean	Std.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Performance	3.75	0.49									
2. Helping behavior	3.97	0.49	.16**								
3. Female	0.59	0.49	.04	-.05							
4. Age	39.37	10.79	.22**	.10*	-.01						
5. Education	6.35	6.21	.00	-.02	-.03	-.22**					
6. Household chores	11.64	7.78	.03	-.03	.20**	.24**	-.13**				
7. Care tasks	6.21	10.05	.03	-.02	.09	.03	-.06	.35**			
8. Working hours	34.05	11.69	-.03	.10*	-.51**	-.18**	.08	-.40**	-.21**		
9. Work pressure	3.13	0.62	.00	.03	.06	.20**	-.06	.12**	.09	.01	
10. Motivation	3.72	0.64	.22**	.09*	.10*	.03	-.02	.05	.08	.03	-.03**
11. Autonomy	3.67	0.81	.03	.10*	-.10*	-.15**	.14**	-.16**	-.02	.33**	-.13**
12. Nonprofit sector	0.30	0.46	.10*	-.03	.51**	.35**	-.19**	.43**	.15**	-.64**	.24**
13. Single	0.20	0.40	-.17**	-.05	.09*	-.26**	.17**	-.20**	-.25**	.04	-.04
14. Couple	0.35	0.48	.09	.08	-.04	-.07	-.01	-.19**	-.31**	.20**	-.08
15. Parent	0.45	0.50	.05	-.04	-.04	.27**	-.12**	.35**	.50**	-.22**	.11*
16. FWA availability	2.28	1.68	-.08	.00	-.27**	-.24**	.16**	-.30**	-.05	.48**	-.09*
17. Telecommuting	0.18	0.39	-.05	-.01	-.17**	-.19**	.09	-.16**	.07	.37**	.09
18. Flextime	0.53	0.49	-.07	.01	-.13**	-.20**	.08*	-.16**	.07	.24**	.06
19. Supervisor support	3.75	0.72	.10*	.11*	-.14**	-.13**	.01	-.10*	.00	.15**	-.26**
20. FR culture	3.30	0.58	.12**	.08	-.03	-.07	-.01	-.05	-.02	-.05	-.36**
10. Motivation	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
11. Autonomy	.30**										
12. Nonprofit sector	.07	-.24**									
13. Single	-.16**	.00	-.09								
14. Couple	.09*	.08	-.15**	-.36**							
15. Parent	.04	-.08	.22**	-.45**	-.67**						
16. FWA availability	.08	.46**	-.49**	.05	.03	-.07					
17. Telecommuting	.15**	.32**	-.24**	-.04	-.05	.07	.55**				
18. Flextime	.13**	.30**	-.23**	-.02	-.03	.04	.39**	.39**			
19. Supervisor support	.11*	.26**	-.24**	-.11*	.09*	.00	.13**	.13**	.16**		
20. FR culture	.22**	.18**	-.10*	-.03	.07	-.04	.07	-.07	.09	.39**	

Note: n = 482

*p < .05; **p < .01.

Source: Family and Work Outcomes Survey (ten Brummelhuis, van der Lippe, & Kluwer, 2007).

T A B L E I I Regression Analyses of the Interaction Effects of WLB Support and Household Structure on Helping Behavior and Work Performance

Predictors	Helping Behavior					Work Performance		
	Control Model	FWA Availability	Telecommuting	Flextime	Supervisor Support	Control Model	Supervisor Support	FR Culture
Controls								
Female	-.00	-.00	-.00	.00	-.00	.03	.05	.05
Age	.01*	.01*	.01*	.01*	.01*	.01**	.01**	.01**
Education	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	.01**	.01**	.01**
Household chores	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
Care tasks	-.00	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Working hours	.00	.01	.01	.01	.00	.01	.01	.01
Work pressure	.01	.05	.05	.04	.04	-.04	.01	.01
Motivation	.05	.04	.04	.04	.04	.16**	.14**	.14**
Autonomy	.04	.05	.05	.04	.05	-.00	-.00	-.00
Nonprofit sector	-.01	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.02	.05	.04	.03
WLB support								
FWA availability		-.06*	-.02	-.02	-.02		-.01	-.01
Telecommuting		-.03	-.10*	-.04	-.04		-.01	-.02
Flextime		.01	.01	-.02	.01		-.03	-.02
Supervisor support		.05	.06	.06	-.02		-.01	.06
FR culture		.03	.03	.02	.01		.06	.16**
Household structure								
Single		-.15	-.01	-.14	-.25		-.38	.94*
Couple ¹		-.03	.06	-.03	-.62*		-.53	.35

¹As 'parents' are the reference group in these models, the dummy variable 'parent' is not included in the model.

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TABLE II Regression Analyses of the Interaction Effects of WLB Support and Household Structure on Helping Behavior and Work Performance (continued)

Predictors	Helping Behavior				Work Performance		
	Control Model	FWA Availability	Telecommuting	Flextime	Supervisor Support	Control Model	Supervisor Support FR Culture
Interaction effects							
FWA availability*single		.08**					
FWA availability*couple		.05*					
Telecommuting*single			.20*				
Telecommuting*couple			.08				
Flextime*single				.08*			
Flextime*couple				.04			
Supervisor support*single					.08		.08
Supervisor support*couple					.19*		.15*
FR culture*single							-.32*
FR culture*couple							-.10
R ² Change [†]		.03**	.02*	.03**	.03**		.04**
Total R ²	.04	.07	.06	.07	.07	.10	.14
Total F statistic	4.48**	10.57**	28.08**	19.87**	61.83**	9.93**	14.73**
							18.20**

Note: n = 482; Unstandardized regression coefficients.

*p < .05. **p < .01;

[†]The R² Change was calculated as the difference with the control model.

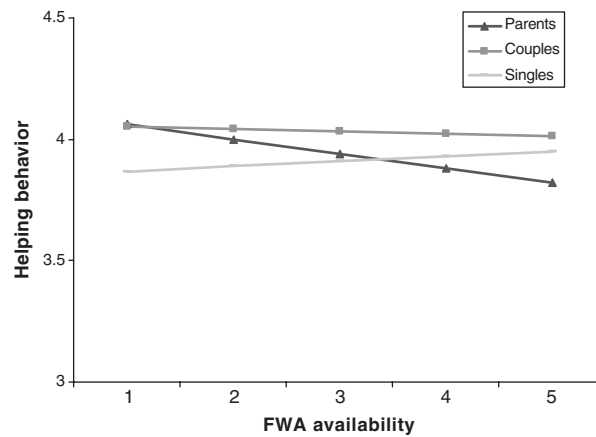


FIGURE 1. The relation between flexible work arrangements availability and helping behavior per household structure

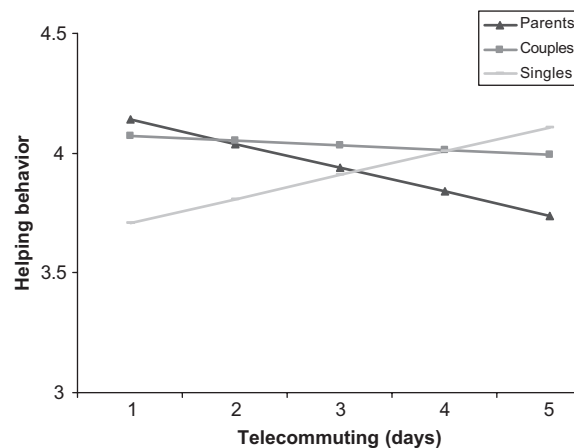


FIGURE 2. The relation between telecommuting and helping behavior per household structure

telecommuting. The additional analysis showed that the effect of telecommuting on helping behavior did not significantly differ between singles and couples. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between telecommuting and helping behavior for singles, couples, and parents.

Consistent with the enrichment approach, we found that the use of *flextime* was most strongly positively related to helping behavior among singles and then among couples, whereas a negative relationship was found among parents (Figure 3). The effect of flextime on helping behavior significantly differed between parents and singles (Table II: $b = .08, p < .05$), but not between parents and couples (Table II), or singles and couples (additional analysis). Finally, we note that the relationship between telecommuting, flextime, FWA availability, on the one hand, and

work performance, on the other hand, did not vary among the three household structures.

Overall, the findings on flexible work arrangements partially support Hypothesis 1, which predicted that flexible work arrangements would have the strongest beneficial effect on the work outcomes of singles, then on couples, and finally on parents. More specifically, helping behavior of parents was significantly lower when using flexible work arrangements, whereas such arrangements were positively related to helping behavior among singles.

The relationship between *supervisor support* and both work outcomes significantly differed between couples and parents (Table II: helping behavior $b = .19, p < .05$; work performance $b = .15, p < .05$), but not between singles and parents (Table II). Supervisor sup-

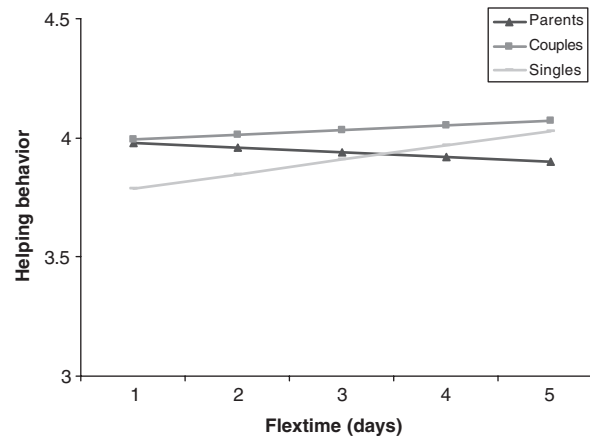


FIGURE 3. The relation between flextime and helping behavior per household structure

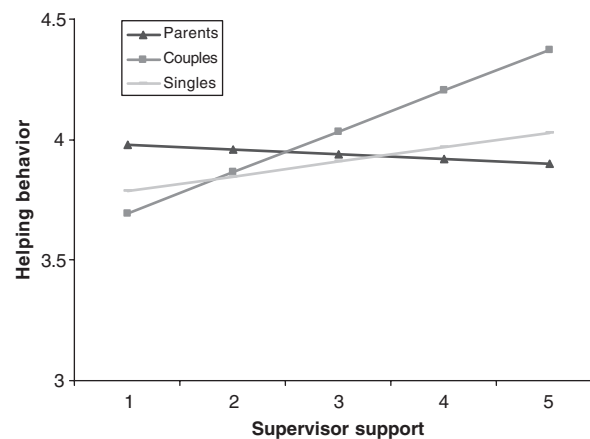


FIGURE 4. The relation between supervisor support and helping behavior per household structure

port was most strongly, positively related to both work outcomes among couples (Figures 4 and 5). Similar but weaker relationships were found among singles, whereas supervisor support was negatively related to work outcomes among parents. The relationships did not differ significantly between couples and singles (additional analysis). These findings were not in line with Hypothesis 2, which predicted that singles would derive the biggest beneficial effects from supervisor support, followed by couples, and finally by parents. Instead, couples benefited most from supervisor support, then singles, and finally parents. These findings thus neither support the conflict approach nor the enrichment approach.

Whereas the relationship between *FR culture* and helping behavior did not vary among the three household structures, the relation-

ship between the organization's *FR culture* and work performance differed significantly between singles and parents (Table II: $b = -.32, p < .05$). Consistent with the conflict approach, the relationship between *FR culture* and work performance was negative among singles, whereas it was positive among parents and couples (Figure 6). The additional analysis with singles as the reference category indicated that this relationship also significantly differed between singles and couples ($b = .22, p < .05$). These findings were in accordance with Hypothesis 3. In particular, parents benefited from an *FR culture*, followed by couples, whereas the work performance of singles was poorer when the *FR culture* was stronger.

Table III provides an overview of all findings. We also indicated according to family structure whether the main effects between

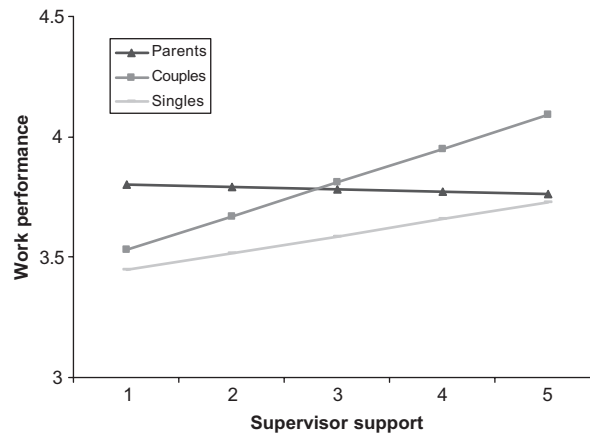


FIGURE 5. The relation between supervisor support and work performance per household structure

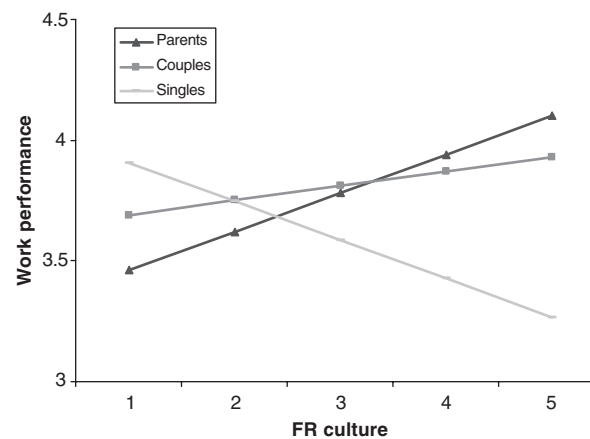


FIGURE 6. The relation between a family-responsive culture and work performance per household structure

the support measures and the work outcomes were significant. In summary, flexible work arrangements improved helping behavior most among singles, whereas an FR culture reduced singles' work performance. Supervisor support increased work outcomes most among couples and then singles. Parents performed better when the organizational culture was family responsive, whereas flexible work arrangements reduced their helping behavior.

Discussion

Using insights from the conflict approach and the enrichment approach, we aimed to explain when work-life balance support helps improve work outcomes most: when it is given to employees with the heaviest family demands or when support is given to em-

ployees with the fewest resources at home. We compared the effectiveness of WLB support among single employees, employees with a partner, and employees with a partner and children. Singles appeared to take advantage of several types of support, although a pronounced work-family culture hindered them, as evidenced by poorer work performance. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that suggested singles feel work-life policies that primarily focus on employees with a family discriminate against them (Casper et al., 2007). The availability and the use of flexible work arrangements were related to higher levels of helping behavior among single employees. Apparently, single employees particularly appreciate being able to work at home and on a flexible schedule. Singles reciprocate for this benefit by increasing their investment in cooperative relation-

TABLE III Overview of Findings: Relationships Between WLB Support and Work Outcomes Among Singles, Couples, and Parents

	Helping Behavior			Work Performance			Test for Hypothesis
	Single	Couple	Parent	Single	Couple	Parent	
FWA availability	+	–	– –*				1v
Telecommuting	+	–	– –*				1v
Flextime	+	+	–				1v
Supervisor support	+	++*	–	+	++*	–	2x
FR culture				–*	+	++*	3v

– = Weak negative relationship.

– – = Strong negative relationship.

+ = Weak positive relationship.

++ = Strong positive relationship.

* = Main effect significant $p < .05$.

v = Supported.

x = Not supported.

ships at work (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Flexibility at work may be of particular relevance for single employees, because they lack family members who can help them in emergencies that require them to leave the workplace. These findings support the idea derived from enrichment theory that employees who have fewer resources in the household (e.g., a partner who helps with chores) benefit most from additional support at work.

Supervisor support appeared to be of great importance in improving work performance and helping behavior among couples. Unexpectedly, supervisor support was related to only slightly higher work outcomes of singles. One explanation for this unexpected result is that singles are more active than couples in seeking emotional support within their social network. Previous studies have indicated that marriage and cohabiting often reduce the partners' social network (Kalmijn, 2003). In other words, whereas singles have more sources of advice and affect (friends and extended family members), employees with a partner tend to rely more on support from their supervisor. Moreover, the supervisor support included in this study also concerned support in work-related issues. If the partner is unable to advise on such problems, the employee will presumably turn to the supervisor. The single employee, on the other hand, can seek support from compe-

tent friends. Parents profited the least from supervisor support. We suggest that the relative importance of organizational support (work-family culture) counteracts any advantageous effects of supervisor support on parents' work outcomes. In addition, employees with a family may represent a relatively more experienced group in the organization, occupying a further life stage (Eby, Allen, Noble, & Lockwood, 2004). This group may need less support from their supervisors than newcomers in the labor market, who are less likely to have started a family (couples and singles).

A positive, family-friendly organizational culture was associated with higher work performance among parents, unlike other support strategies such as flexible work arrangements, supervisor support, and help with household tasks. These results stress the importance of the organization's family-friendly culture for employees with heavy care loads, something other studies have confirmed (Premeaux et al., 2007). Presumably, employees with families appreciate that their employer respects their family life. This increases their job motivation and dedication (Hill et al., 2003), which is reflected in better work performance. Remarkably, the use of flexible work arrangements (telecommuting and flextime) did not improve parents' work outcomes. As other researchers have suggested, these policies may lead to more inter-

ference between work and family roles (Desrochers et al., 2005). For example, when using flextime results in an irregular daily schedule, in which short periods of work are alternated by time spent with children, the employee might not be able to concentrate fully on his or her work. This is in line with previous research reporting that the use of flexible work schedules decreased productivity among men with children (Wallace & Young, 2008).

The present study's cultural context may also shed light on the puzzling finding that parents did not benefit from flexible work arrangements. In The Netherlands, employees spend less time on paid work (33.6 hours) and household tasks (17.7 hours) than employees in other European countries and the United States. The majority of employed women (61%) work less than 30 hours a week, facilitating the combination of work and family tasks (SCP, 2006). Moreover, in the U.S. there are fewer governmental policies on combining work and care tasks. Recent figures show that one-fourth of American employers provide some period of paid maternity leave, while one-fifth of employers provide no maternity leave. Although the Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to recent parents, only 60% of the U.S. workforce—permanently tenured employees working in large organizations—is covered by this law (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2008). In contrast, Dutch employees are entitled to 42 weeks, maternity leave, of which 16 weeks are paid. The relatively moderate demands on Dutch parents and the ample governmental support to which they have access might explain why additional support did not contribute to their work outcomes. It is possible, then, that our results underestimate the effectiveness of WLB support among parents. WLB support may improve parents' work outcomes in countries characterized by heavier demands and fewer governmental policies.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was subject to a number of limitations. The data were collected at a single

point in time, meaning that no firm conclusions can be drawn regarding the causality of the relationships between WLB support and employee outcomes. Longitudinal evaluation studies of WLB support may help elaborate cross-sectional studies. Also, this study limited itself to comparing employees with and without *care for children*. We acknowledge that employees may also care for other people, such as elderly parents and friends. Furthermore, using self-reports may have led to bias due to common method variance and decreased internal consistency reliability for the work outcome measures. Future studies could improve the measurements of helping behavior through co-worker assessments, while work performance could be rated by the supervisor (van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994). We also note that the study's cultural context may make it difficult to generalize the results, because time demands are heavier among American parents, for example, whereas state and corporate work-family policies assist Dutch parents in adjusting their working hours to their family demands. Cross-country data is needed to determine whether our findings also hold for other countries.

Nevertheless, the strengths of our study are the relatively large number of employees with varying family structures, which enabled us to study the effectiveness of work-life balance policies for singles, couples, and parents. Furthermore, we have information on employees from multiple organizations representing a wide range of industries. This resolves issues associated with single-firm or -industry studies.

Our results provide several leads for future research. It would be particularly relevant to evaluate the effectiveness of WLB support among single-parent employees, because these employees must meet heavy demands at home but lack a partner's support. A large-scale study is needed to ensure information on an appropriately large Zof single parents. Furthermore, future studies could extend the types of support that employees might receive, such as the attitude of the direct manager toward combining dual

roles (Thompson et al., 1999), the provision and use of organizations' instrumental support (e.g., day care and domestic services), and advice, understanding, and help with care tasks from the partner, family members, and friends. Finally, future research should check whether the relationships between WLB support and work outcomes differ between employees with and without additional care tasks (e.g., care for elderly).

Implications for Practice

This study's findings have practical relevance when employees and employers are considering what support measures are appropriate for balancing work and life roles. The challenge for managers is to create a work culture that advocates the combination of work and life in general. Such a culture would respect parents' family demands in addition to their work role, without neglecting other life roles that singles and couples may have. In addition, managers could take into account that employees without a nuclear family (couples and singles) particularly need their support,

including recognition and feedback. Finally, employees might consider that telecommuting can harm work outcomes when it entails fulfilling dual roles at home simultaneously.

Conclusion

Although work-life policies are aimed primarily at dual-earner families, we found that WLB support was associated with only a marginal improvement in the work outcomes of employees with a partner and children. Our results weakly support the idea derived from the conflict approach that support helps when it is given to employees with heavy demands. Instead, we found more support for the enrichment approach, assuming that WLB support works by complementing family resources, because singles and then couples profited most from various WLB support measures. As a contribution to previous work-family research, our study stresses the importance of taking into account employees' specific family background when studying the effectiveness of work-life policies.

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